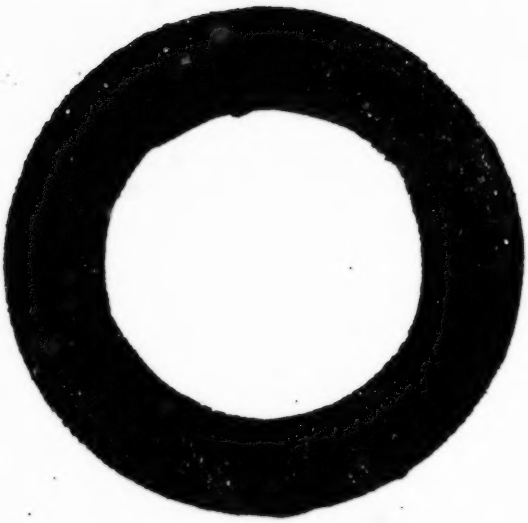

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COMMITTEE AGAINST TORTURE

Twelfth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FIRST PART (PUBLIC)* OF THE 174th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 18 April 1994, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. DIPANDA MOUELLE

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Statement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

* The summary record of the second part (closed) of the meeting appears as document CAT/C/SR.174/Add.1.

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

STATEMENT BY THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

1. The CHAIRMAN invited Mr. José Ayala Lasso, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, to make a statement.

2. Mr. AYALA LASSO (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that the creation of the post of High Commissioner for Human Rights, pursuant to a recommendation adopted by the Vienna Conference in 1993 had been a "first" in the history of the United Nations. In view of the wide-ranging and sensitive nature of the duties associated with the post, he would need the full support of all States and the various human rights bodies, including the Committee against Torture, and the cooperation of intergovernmental and non-governmental agencies and organizations, to be sure of success in carrying out his mandate.

3. He would be placing particular emphasis on compliance by all States with the commitments they had entered into in ratifying or acceding to international human rights instruments. With that in mind, he would be endeavouring to establish sound working relationships with all the human rights treaty bodies and to enhance their effectiveness. He would welcome suggestions from the Committee as to how the members of the treaty bodies could best support him in his work.

4. Against that general background, the work of the Committee against Torture was of particular interest to him. Arbitrary detentions and torture were among his most immediate concerns, since torture was obviously one of the worst possible human rights violations. Freedom from torture was an absolute right under both human rights law and international humanitarian law, and must be protected in all circumstances.

5. The Vienna Conference had called for the speedy ratification by all States of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. To achieve that objective, he intended to promote the dissemination of information about the Convention and the activities of the Committee against Torture, and would urge States which had not yet ratified the Convention to do so. He would also endeavour to ensure that technical and advisory assistance were provided to States which needed help in overcoming obstacles to ratification, as the Committee had recommended.

6. He strongly believed that the United Nations must also be ready to provide such assistance to States experiencing difficulties in complying fully with their obligations under the Convention; he was determined that it should respond favourably to requests for help to the best of its ability.

7. The World Conference had reaffirmed the importance of preventive measures in eradicating torture and had called for the early adoption of an optional protocol to the Convention with the aim of establishing a system of regular visits to places of detention which would strengthen protection for people held in custody and enhance the effectiveness of the Convention. He would follow closely the elaboration of such an optional protocol.

8. In conclusion, he assured the Committee that he would do his utmost to assist it in its work. He noted the success of the Committee in developing an effective system of reporting on the implementation of the Convention, and the fact that the Committee had been formulating precise conclusions and recommendations after considering States' reports, had investigated allegations of the systematic use of torture, under article 20 of the Convention, and had been dealing with a growing number of individual complaints. He would keep himself closely informed of the Committee's activities with a view to ensuring that the Committee was given all the secretariat support it needed, and that its recommendations for the effective implementation of the Convention were followed up in an appropriate way. He wished the Committee every success in its present session and looked forward to continued collaboration with it.

9. The CHAIRMAN thanked the High Commissioner for his statement. He fully appreciated the scale of the task facing the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and said that the Committee was determined to collaborate with him to the best of its ability. He wished the Office of the High Commissioner success in its future work.

The public meeting rose at 3.20 p.m.